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ABSTRACT

The goals of this instructional program for California public school children aged five through eight, begun during the 1973-74 school year, are to insure that all children who complete third grade will be able to read, write, and compute and to help children develop positive attitudes toward school so that they can achieve their learning potential throughout their compulsory school years. This document outlines briefly the instructional components of the program (language development, reading, mathematics, multicultural education, bilingual-bicultural education, and other curriculum areas), the support components (staff development, parent participation, parent education, and health/auxiliary services), and program strategies, and includes three tables charting results of a program evaluation. (JM)

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CALIFORNIA'S EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION PROGRAM
(ITS IMPACT ON READING AND LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT OF CHILDREN AGES 5-9)

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"The people of the State of California, through their elected representatives must make a long-range commitment to the proposition that the first eight years of life are the most important period in determining the future success of all of our citizens." --- California Early Childhood Education Task Force.

Introduction

One of the greatest possibilities for reform in public education in California was authorized by the State Legislature in 1972. The State Department of Education initiated the Early Childhood Education program (ECE) during the 1973-74 school year. The intent of the master plan is to implement the program in all schools by 1978-79.

The new legislation launched an instructional program for children ages five through eight which will significantly restructure the primary educational program of the state. The major goal of the program is to insure that every child who completes the third grade will be able to read, write, and compute. A secondary goal is to help the child develop positive attitudes toward school that will enable him to achieve his learning potential during the remainder of his compulsory schooling.

The effort is pumping new hope and vigor into public education by making fundamental changes in the traditional ways school work.

- It is beginning to restructure the entire educational program at four grade levels.
- It is bringing together all of the most successful learning and teaching practices into each classroom.
- It is giving parents a meaningful voice in the reform of their children's schools.

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PROGRAM DETAILS

The need to restructure education at the K-3 level is great. Too many children entering the school system for the first time each year find the challenge of mastering basic reading and mathematics skills overwhelming. Too often the grim pattern of failure is fixed early in the primary grades. Providing a quality educational program in the early years which is based on the need of each child will be far less costly than establishing extensive remedial programs later.

California's ECE program is designed to improve the educational experience of all children not just one group and to integrate all federal and categorical aide programs into the overall school instructional program.

Each of the ECE school plans in operation in 1974-75 provided for the following:

- An assessment of local school needs
- Locally defined objectives expressed in terms that can be measured
- A restructured instructional program to ensure continuous progress by each child, particularly in the basic areas of reading, language usage, and mathematics
- Staff development and inservice education
- Parent participation
- Parent education
- Evaluation of pupils' health needs
- Multicultural experiences for all children
- Bilingual instruction, in appropriate situations for children with limited or no ability to speak English
- Coordination of all educational resources at the school -- state, and local -- to meet the needs of the children
- Continual evaluation of each child's progress and of the program itself

Each district was asked to develop its own master plan for ECE for the Department of Education approval. These plans were designed on a school by school basis within each district. Programs were prepared by local planning groups composed of teachers, parents and administrators based on identified needs of children in the specific schools. There are ten components; of which six are instructional and four are in support of instruction.

Instructional Components

1. *Language Development.* Defined to mean development of oral language facility (listening, speaking, reasoning skills) for all children as a means of oral communication and as a base for developing skills in reading and written composition. Instruction includes grammar, punctuation, and spelling at appropriate levels.
2. *Reading.* Defined to mean reading readiness, decoding comprehension and interpretation of written language (including understanding of sentence structure and meaning of punctuation); and the development of interests and attitudes that lead to personal satisfaction from reading.
3. *Mathematics.* Defined to include those concrete experiences that help children develop concepts related to numbers and operations, measurement, and informal geometry. These concrete activities are designed to help children discover mathematical relationships and to help them effectively communicate these relationships in symbolic form.
4. *Multicultural Education.* Defined as the educational process that ensures the development of human dignity and respect for all peoples. An essential goal within this process is that differences be understood and accepted, not simply tolerated. Within this definition lie the concepts embraced by cultural pluralism, bilingual education, crosscultural education, ethnic and intercultural studies, and intergroup and human relations. Each concept is perceived as a necessary element of a comprehensive multicultural education program, but none alone can satisfy all the requirements of a multicultural education program. Multicultural education, then, is an interdisciplinary educational process rather than a single program.
5. *Bilingual-Bicultural Education.* Defined to mean an educational program that is provided for students whose dominant language is other than English and that includes instruction in both English and the student's primary language. Such a program may include tutoring by a teacher, parent, instructional aide, or peer. Bilingual-bicultural education programs:
6. *Other Curriculum Areas.* Defined to mean music, art, science, social studies, and physical education.

Instructional Support Components

1. *Staff Development.* Defined to mean the recruitment and/or assignment of teachers and paid and volunteer aides relative to specific requirements in the proposed plan. Includes preservice and inservice training for teachers, other professional staff, aides, and volunteers. Such training will enable these personnel to provide specific support to the proposed instructional program and to understand and meet the needs of all children.
2. *Parent Participation.* Defined to mean participation in planning, implementation, modification, and evaluation of the program. Includes direct involvement of parents in the formal classroom education of their children.
3. *Parent Education.* Defined to mean a program that includes activities based on expressed needs of parents. Designed to enable parents to play a central role in the education of their children through understanding and support of the instructional program; to increase their effectiveness as parents; and to be more successful in their own lives and careers.
4. *Health/Auxiliary Services.* Includes counseling and guidance, attendance, nutrition, health education, and library and health services. Health services include screening and diagnosis, referral, and follow-up efforts in the areas of visual, auditory, dental, physical, and emotional health.

PROGRAM STRATEGIES

Implementation Strategies

The first emphasis is the restructuring of K-3 so that a child may make continuous progress based upon his needs, interests, and capacities. This restructuring could take many forms such as multi-age classes, team teaching, or flexible regrouping of children on the basis of diagnosed learning needs.

Strategies For Encouraging Parent Involvement

The program mandates parent involvement in planning and evaluation, and necessitates a parent-volunteer program. Suggested strategies could include: a door-to-door survey to inform the other parents of the new program, sending fliers home, and a recruitment program headed by a paid community aide.

Volunteers should be brought together regularly for problem-solving sessions to discuss their concerns and an inservice program planned to meet their expressed needs. The importance of a community aide cannot be overstressed. In order to sustain and expand this volunteer parent involvement it was evident that a community person needed to be hired to coordinate the program, arrange baby-sitting for some parents, plan for substitutes, visit homes of new families in the community and work as a liaison between the community and the school.

Community Articulation

The Community College can serve as a valuable source for parent education, and development of an off campus laboratory site which provides student teachers with real community situations. Such a laboratory provides Junior College instructors an opportunity to teach theory in the classroom and demonstrates the teaching technique in a regular primary classroom.

Program Evaluation

The reading/language development component was directed toward improvement of reading skills and of written and oral language skills. Participating schools were encouraged to restructure their reading and language programs by using a variety of different methods and new instructional materials.

Statewide, a total of 134,470 students in kindergarten and grades one, two, and three were tested in reading/language development activities in the ECE program in the 1973-74 school year. Table I shows the number and percent of students tested by grade level.

More than 79 percent of all ECE school evaluations contained statements of measurable objectives. Objectives were most frequently stated in terms of months of growth per month of instruction, as measured by norm-referenced standardized tests.

TABLE I

NUMBER AND PERCENT OF STUDENTS TESTED IN EARLY CHILDHOOD
EDUCATION READING/LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES
BY GRADE LEVEL, 1973-74

Grade level	Number of students tested	Percent of students tested
Kindergarten	28,944	21.5
One	39,145	29.1
Two	34,302	25.5
Three	32,079	23.9
Total	134,470	100.0

Data presented in Table II pertain to rank order of activities most frequently reported by successful reading/language development programs.

TABLE II

RANK ORDER OF ACTIVITIES MOST FREQUENTLY REPORTED BY
SUCCESSFUL READING/LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS
IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION SCHOOLS, 1973-74

Rank	Activities	Percent of reporting schools
1	Diagnostic/prescriptive materials	62.1
2	Individualized instruction within regular classroom	40.8
3	Use of instructional aides	32.7
4	Commercially developed instructional materials	16.9
5	Reading lab centers	16.9

In those ECE schools using normative standardized achievement measures, months of gain in reading skill per month of instruction were computed for students in grades one, two, and three. In computing gain scores, only those students were included for whom both pretest and post-test were available.

Test results revealed that, with an average of seven months between the pretest and the post-test, students in schools receiving ECE funds at grades one, two, and three typically attained 1.1 months growth in reading achievement for each months of instruction. (See Table 3) Previous evaluations of specially funded programs have indicated that .7 months of growth per month of instruction was typical for disadvantaged children.

TABLE III

AVERAGE READING/LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT BY EARLY CHILDHOOD
EDUCATION STUDENTS TESTED BY GRADE LEVEL, 1973-74

Grade level	Number of Students tested	Average grade equivalent score		Average months of gain per month of instruction*
		Pretest	Post-test	
One	14,716	1.1	1.9	1.1
Two	30,982	1.7	2.5	1.1
Three	28,803	2.4	3.3	1.1

*An average of seven months elapsed between pretest and post-test.

Programs such as ECE that have the most descriptive and well-defined guidelines, program audits, and specific objectives have a better chance of producing positive results than programs that do not contain these requirements.

Summation

The ECE program in California has not discovered a magical new method of teaching or learning. It has no easy solutions. Instead, it leans heavily on old-fashioned hard work and the creativeness of many diverse talents. It is both a process and a result. The process is the manner in which educators, school board members, and parents transform a school from the traditional mode to one that incorporates the lessons of modern educational research into the mainstream of its program. The results, which differs from one school to another, is a new kind of school where children have an opportunity to learn more than they did under traditional programs and to achieve at a level nearer their full learning potential.